DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 554 CS 001 496

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TITLE Elementary School Teachers' Reading.
PUB DATE Nov 74
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College Reading Association (18th, Bethesda, Maryland, October 31-November 2, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Elementary School Teachers; Inservice Programs; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Reading Habits; Reading Improvement; Reading Interests; *Reading Research; Surveys; Teacher Behavior; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

The reading habits of inservice elementary school teachers were surveyed through questionnaires administered in the summers of 1966 and 1972. The present study examined the findings of the two surveys for differences and possible inferences. Answers were sought to such questions as what magazines other than professional education journals were read; which professional education journals were read regularly; what books, other than textbooks, were being read; what books had been read in the last twelve months; who favorite authors were; what books were considered for reading next; and whether or not time was set aside during the week for reading. The overall differences observed between the two groups were considerably less extensive than the similarities. The compelling similarity was the amount of non-reading reported by so many teachers in both groups. (HOD)

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' READING

Robert V. Duffey

In the summer of 1966 the writer surveyed with a brief questionnaire the reading reported by in-service elementary school teachers enrolled in courses offered by the Department of Early Childhood-Elementary Education in an Eastern university.* In the summer of 1972 the writer administered the same instrument to the equivalent population in the same institution. The purpose of the present study was to examine the findings of the two surveys for differences and to draw inferences warrarted by the evidence.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained seven questions:

1. What magazines other than professional Education journals do you read regularly?
2. Which professional Education journals do you read regularly?
3. What book (other than textbooks) are you now reading?
4. List the books you remember having read during the past twelve months.
5. Who is your favorite non-Education author (or authors)?
6. Which book or books do you have in mind to read next?
7. Do you have a time of day or day in the week that you keep for reading? If yes, when?

The Respondents

Some descriptive data about the two groups of respondents are given in Table I. Two differences between them are seen at once: the 1972 group was larger in the pre-school category and correspondingly smaller in the intermediate; and the 1972 group was less experienced in teaching. Both these differences were

*Reported in "Speaking to the Issues: Position Papers in Reading", pp.30-46. College of Education, University of Maryland, 1967.

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almost certainly the result of two developments which took place during the interval between the surveys. One of these was the state's mandating kindergartens.

TABLE I

PER CENTS OF RESPONDENTS IN LEVEL TAUGHT AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES

	Years of Teaching Experience									
Level Taught	1 to 5		6 to 10		11 to 15		16 or more		Totals	
	1966	1972	1966	1972	1966	1972	1966	1972	1966 (N=213)	1972 (N=201)
Pre-school	6.1	15.0	2.4	4.5	0.9	1.5	0.9	0.5	10.3	21.5
Primary	27.2	33.0	10.3	6.0	5.6	5.0	3.3	2.5	46.4	46.5
Intermediate	25.3	21.0	11.3	5.5	3.8	3.0	2.8	3.0	43.2	32.5
Totals	58.6	69.0	24.0	16.0	10.3	9.5	7.0	6.0	99.9	100.5

The number of kindergarten teachers in the 1972 group was more than twice the 1966 number. The other development was the rise of the middle school. There were fewer than half as many sixth grade teachers in the 1972 group as in 1966.

The number of men in the 1966 study was 19, or 9 per cent, and in the 1972 study the number was 14, or 7 per cent.

Findings

Question 1: What magazines other than professional Education journals do you read regularly?

The responses to this question are summarized in Table 2. These data show that in four of the first five categories of magazines, the 1972 teachers were reading less than their counterparts were reading in 1966. In the Sports and H Hobbies and Scientific categories the 1972 group was reading more.

TABLE 2

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PER CENTS OF RESPONDENTS READING POPULAR MAGAZINES

Categories of Magazines	Respondents, by Levels Taught: Pre-school 1966 (N=22)	Pre-school 1972 (N=43)	Primary 1966 (N=99)	Primary 1972 (N=93)	Intermediate 1966 (N=92)	Intermediate 1972 (N=65)	Totals 1966 (N=213)	Totals 1972 (N=201)
News	40.9	55.8	54.5	52.7	63.0	61.5	56.7	56.2
General	68.1	44.2	77.8	50.0	79.3	63.1	77.4	52.7
Ladies	63.6	32.6	55.6	48.4	35.9	36.9	47.8	41.3
Literary	18.1	16.3	15.2	9.7	10.9	12.3	13.6	11.9
Travel	9.1	7.0	7.1	9.7	18.5	10.8	12.2	9.5
Sports, Hobbies	4.5	9.3	1.0	8.6	3.3	9.2	2.3	9.0
Scientific	9.1	11.6	0.0	7.5	2.2	7.7	1.9	8.5
Other	0.0	11.6	11.1	10.8	8.7	18.5	8.9	13.4
None	0.0	11.6	6.1	7.5	7.6	4.6	6.1	7.5

The mean number of magazines read regularly by the 1966 group was 3.3; by the 1972 group, 2.86. Excepting magazines in the News category, in which the groups reported nearly equal amounts of reading, the magazines named were predominantly monthlies.

Question 2: Which professional Education journals do you read regularly?

The chief purpose of this question was to learn the extent to which teachers were reading journals with an interest in the teaching of reading. The findings in Table 3 show increases in the reported readership of the teaching journals.

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TABLE 3

PER CENTS OF RESPONDENTS READING
PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION JOURNALS

Journals	Respondents, by Levels Taught							
	Pre-school		Primary		Intermediate		Totals	
	1966 (N=22)	1972 (N=43)	1966 (N=99)	1972 (N=93)	1966 (N=92)	1972 (N=65)	1966 (N=213)	1972 (N=201)
Instructor	18.1	30.2	40.4	51.6	32.6	44.6	34.7	44.8
Grade Teacher	13.6	32.6	34.3	38.7	26.1	24.6	28.6	32.8
Today's Education (N.E.A. Journal)	36.3	18.6	52.5	20.4	56.6	30.8	52.5	23.4
Early Years	---	27.9	---	11.8	----	0.0	---	11.4
Maryland Teacher	22.7	7.0	32.3	10.8	39.1	12.3	34.2	10.4
Reading Teacher	0.0	2.3	3.0	9.7	1.1	13.8	1.9	9.5
Elementary English	0.0	2.3	3.0	7.5	5.4	10.8	3.7	7.5
Childhood Education	9.1	20.9	1.0	3.2	3.3	1.5	2.8	6.5
Arithmetic Teacher	---	2.3	----	1.1	----	7.7	----	3.5
Young Children	----	11.6	----	1.1	----	0.0	----	3.0
Children Today	----	7.0	----	1.1	----	3.1	----	3.0
Other	22.7	13.9	7.1	8.6	13.0	33.8	11.3	16.9
None	40.9	20.9	10.1	20.4	16.3	18.5	15.9	19.9

The number of teachers who reported reading no professional Education journal regularly in 1966 was one in six; in 1972 it was one ~~to~~ in five. Dramatic losses in readership occurred in the national and the state education associations journals.

The mean number of journals read per teacher was the same for both years: 1.7.

Question 3: What book (other than textbooks) are you reading now?

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Roughly six per cent of the respondents in each group named more than one book. In these cases, the book named first was counted. Table 4, shows that one-third of the 1972 group reported no present reading, a reduction from the two-fifths of the 1966 group. Interestingly, so few books on Education (not textbooks) were reported in 1966 that they were included in the Other category; but the 1972 people were listing Holt, Silberman, et al, to the extent of 8.5 per cent.

TABLE 4

PER CENTS OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING READING BOOKS

Categories of Books	Respondents, by Levels Taught							
	Pre-school		Primary		Intermediate		Total	
	1966 (N=22)	1972 (N=43)	1966 (N=99)	1972 (N=93)	1966 (N=92)	1972 (N=65)	1966 (N=213)	1972 (N=201)
Fiction	31.8	39.5	42.4	33.3	37.0	36.9	38.9	35.8
Non-fiction	13.6	11.6	13.1	9.7	8.6	13.8	11.3	11.4
Biography	4.5	2.3	2.0	7.5	6.5	3.1	4.2	5.0
Other	0.0	7.0	6.0	7.5	4.4	0.0	4.7	5.0
None	50.0	30.2	36.4	34.4	43.5	36.9	40.8	34.3
Education	----	9.3	----	7.5	----	9.2	----	8.5

Question 4: List the books you remember having read during the past twelve months.

The unfairness of this question to persons who read even just one book a month was mentioned in the 1967 report. Undoubtedly, the numbers in both surveys are somewhat attenuated. Assuming equal attenuation in both studies, the number of books read by the 1972 group can be seen to be down about 13.5 per cent, the decrease occurring chiefly in the Fiction category.

The teachers reporting have read no book during the preceding year in 1966 were 14.5 per cent of the group; their counterparts in 1972 were 10.9 per cent of the group.

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TABLE 5

BOOKS READ BY RESPONDENTS IN PAST YEAR

Categories of Books	Number of Books Read							
	Pre-school		Primary		Intermediate		Total	
	1966 (N=22)	1972 (N=43)	1966 (N=99)	1972 (N=93)	1966 (N=92)	1972 (N-65)	1966 (N=213)	1972 (N=201)
Fiction	53	86	328	197	264	136	645	419
Non-fiction	4	23	28	40	22	26	54	89
Biography	0	5	18	21	23	11	41	37
Other	6	32	17	46	30	28	53	106
None	4	4	17	8	10	7	31	22
Mean	2.7	3.4	4.1	3.3	3.7	3.2	3.7	3.2

Question 5: Who is your favorite Non-Education author (or authors)?

In response to this question the teachers in 1966 named 89 different authors; the group in 1972 named 85. In 1966, these authors were named by five or more teachers Hemingway, 20; Steinback, 9; Uris, 8; DuMaurier, 7; Salinger, 6; Fleming, 5; Buck, 5; Henry James, 5; and Irving Stone, 5. In 1972, the authors ranking highest were: Steinbeck, 6; Stone, 6; Buck, 5; and Agatha Christie, 5.

The per cent of teachers reporting no favorite author in 1966 was 47.4; in 1972 it was 54.2. The breakdown by grade levels for 1966 and 1972 respectively was: pre-school, 50% and 53.5%; primary, 50% and 51.6%; intermediate, 45% and 58.5.

Question 6: Which book or books do you have in mind to read next?

Very nearly half the teachers in each group reported having in mind no book to read next (Table 6.). The teachers who reported that they were not reading a book at the time of the survey and also had no book in mind to read next comprised 17.4 per cent of the group in 1966, 22 per cent in 1972. Those who had not read

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a book in a year, were not reading one at the time of the survey, and had no book in mind to read next comprised 8 per cent of the group in 1966, 4 per cent in 1972. Among the teachers who did name a book, the 1972 distribution as to kind of book shifted downward in Fiction and upward in Non-fiction and Education, the latter being again largely the popular paperbacks in Education -- Holt, Silberman, Ashton-Warner, Glasser, et al.

TABLE 6

BOOKS THAT CORRESPONDENTS PLAN TO READ NEXT

	Respondents, by Grade Levels Taught							
	Pre-school		Primary		Intermediate		Totals	
Categories of Books	1966 (N=22)	1972 (N-43)	1966 (N=99)	1972 (N=93)	1966 (N=92)	1972 (N-65)	1966 (N-213)	1972 (N-201)
Fiction	54.5	13.9	36.4	30.1	28.3	24.6	34.7	24.9
Non-fiction	4.5	16.3	9.1	11.8	4.3	7.7	6.6	11.4
Biography	4.5	0.0	2.0	3.2	8.7	4.6	5.2	3.0
Other	4.5	0.0	1.0	3.2	8.7	4.6	4.7	2.9
None	31.8	58.1	51.5	43.0	50.0	52.3	48.8	49.3
Education	----	11.6	----	8.6	----	6.2	----	8.5

In contrast to the 1966 group, few of the 1972 group volunteered a reason for having no plans to read a book -- most commonly lack of time.

Question 7: Do you have a time of day or day in the week that you keep for reading? If yes, when?

The preponderant answer of both groups was No: 67.1 per cent in 1966; 61.2 per cent in 1972. Favorite times for those answering Yes in both groups were evenings (the typical designation was "bed time") and Sundays.

Summary and Discussion

The composition of the two groups of respondents differed in ways explained by educational developments within the time lapse between the surveys. This

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circumstance precluded some perhaps more convincing analyses of the data; on the other hand, the groups were very likely quite comparable for their times.

The reported reading of popular magazines seemed to show a decline in 1972 over 1966; but probably more important than this were two other observations. First, the mean numbers of magazines read, 3.3 and 2.96 respectively, were not impressive in view of the fact that the magazines were chiefly monthlies. In the weekly category, News, the two groups reported nearly equal amounts of reading. And second, the increased reading reported by the 1972 group in the Sports and Hobbies and the Scientific categories, though notable, seemed inadequate when it is remembered that these categories are of particular interest to boys, who tend to predominate among less successful readers.

The reported reading of professional journals showed no change in the mean number of journals being read regularly (1.7), but it showed increases in the reading of journals that present articles concerning the teaching of reading. Still, the number of teachers reading no professional journal regularly rose only from one in six in 1966 to one in five in 1972.

More teachers in the 1972 group reported that they were reading a non-Education book at the time of the survey -- 68.7 per cent, compared with 59.2 per cent in 1966. Even with this improvement, of course, one teacher in three was not reading a book recreationally at the time.

More teachers in the 1972 group reported that they had read at least one book during the previous year -- 89.1 per cent, compared with 85.5 per cent in 1966. One teacher in ten had not read a book in at least a year.

Teachers' preferences for authors were considerably more scattered in 1972 than in 1966, and more teachers in 1972 (54.2 per cent) said they had no favorite authors than had said so in 1966 (47.4 per cent).

Asked to name a book that they plan to read next, the teachers in each group divided themselves very nearly into two equal categories -- those who had a book

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in mind and those who had none. Two major shifts from the 1966 figures were a decrease in the fiction titles named, and a nearly equal increase in Education titles.

In both surveys, over 60 per cent of the respondents stated that they had no specific time budgeted for reading.

In summary, it seems reasonable to say that the differences observed between the two groups of teachers were considerably less extensive than the similarities; and that the compelling similarity was the amount of non-reading reported by so many teachers in both groups.

It must be remembered that the teachers in these surveys are charged with the unique responsibility of nurturing children in their earliest and continuing experiences in reading. Assuming that we have not succumbed wholly to non-print media, we are duty bound to deal with the question, What can be done to remedy this situation?

Several suggestions, some of them having been mentioned in the earlier report, seem possible of implementation. Teacher educators, principals, and supervisors might pay more attention to in-service and pre-service teachers' reading. Those who persist in not reading could be counseled out of Education as a vocation. How will a teacher whose personal reading is a small, sometime thing generate enthusiasm for reading among young learners? Will he act out a role daily? "Reading," Bacon said, "maketh a full man." The converse seems no less true.

Professors, principals, and supervisors could prove their interest in what teachers are reading by allotting some time to sharing it. There are many people who would enjoy the opportunity of a few minutes to share a vignette from their reading, and such a practice might encourage some sluggards. To some people, reading is at least partly a social activity that consists not only of author-

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reader communication but also reader-other reader communication. In discussions, with the writer, significant numbers of teachers have remarked pointedly about the lack of opportunity in professional meetings for discussion of teachers' readings.

Pre-service and in-service programs could include, for those who need it, systematic work in improvement in reading. It seems altogether possible that people who read little do not enjoy reading well enough to warrant a high priority for it in their lives. One possible reason for not enjoying reading is being unable to read well. The ubiquitous rebuttal, "I do not have time . . .", is nonsense. We all have the same amount of time; how we spend it is an indication of what is most important to us. To a teacher, reading well and much should be very important. So, teachers-to-be and teachers in-service who read little or not at all could be given an opportunity to learn to read well. Such an opportunity might include not only instruction in refinement of skills but also in the development of literary interests.

Exhaustive studies of readers' bodies, minds and souls, of printed materials, and of methods of instruction -- all these have been fruitful and certainly should be continued. The findings of this study lead to the suggestion that another component in the teaching of reading -- the teacher as a reader -- needs attention, too.

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See "What to do," The Reading Teacher, November, 1973, pp.132,133; and Crossfire, "Response to Duffey," The Reading Teacher, May, 1974, pp.828-?91